

FIRST PERSON: 5 quick tips for VBS follow-up

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Baptist Press



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But here's the thing. Follow-up will not magically happen on its own. You must have an intentional strategy in place before VBS and a follow-up plan ready to spring into action as soon as VBS is over.

So here are five tried and true ideas to try as you connect with children and families:

1. Enlist a follow-up director just like you enlist a VBS director.

Make this your point person for coming up with a strategy for follow-up that's effective and easy for everyone to participate in. The follow-up director should enlist a follow-up team to work with VBS teachers to make sure every child is remembered after the week of VBS is over. This is especially important for children who are not already a part of the church family! Those first few weeks immediately after VBS may be the only time a church member is welcome in the home of an

unchurched family. So don't lose the momentum of VBS by putting it off.

Activate follow-up teams immediately after VBS. People will never be more receptive to follow-up than they are immediately after the event. This is a great time to showcase what your church has to offer the entire family. And while we're on the subject, send or deliver information about the church directly to the home. Don't trust that fliers or handouts will make it home with kids from VBS.

2. Embrace a relationship-building approach to follow-up.

Train every VBS worker to intentionally connect with parents during VBS. Talk to them when they drop off or pick up their kids. Try to find things you have in common. Find out where they normally attend church. Tell them how happy you are they're here and how well their kids are connecting with other kids in their group. Outdo one another in being welcoming and inviting so when it comes to following up after VBS, parents have positive impressions of your church.

Follow-up has to be more than a single postcard or phone call. It must be about building a relationship with children and their families. It takes time to develop relationships and an ongoing strategy to move unchurched families into the life of the church. But a relationship is what earns you the right to share the gospel. So it's something we must take seriously.

3. Partner with other kids ministry leaders in your church to bridge VBS with other ongoing programming and summer events for kids.

For example, ask children's Sunday School teachers to participate in follow-up alongside children's VBS teachers. That way visiting kids will already know a familiar face when they visit again. This is huge in helping kids feel connected when they return to church the next time. Kids need to feel a sense of ownership—this is my church, my classroom, my

teacher, my friends—and giving them that sense of ownership is one way to help them feel loved and accepted and that they belong.

4. Provide opportunities for families from within your church to build relationships with unchurched families.

Conduct a family movie night, a cookout in a local park, or some other activity for the whole family within two weeks of VBS to give unchurched families an opportunity to reconnect with the church. This year, why not partner with a local minor league ball team to host a Faith Night? Offer discounted tickets in a reserved seating block and encourage VBS families to attend. Plan for a picnic on the grounds or tailgating before the game begins. Encourage families to get to know a family they haven't met yet.

5. Take a small gift to the home of each child who visited your church during VBS.

It can be something as simple as the Music for Kids CD, Music for Preschoolers CD, Kids Activity Book, Preschool Activity Book, or a small trinket (bookmark or keychain) or decoration from VBS. Any of these would make an excellent gift. Plus, each of these allows a parent to hear the good news of God's Word their kids heard during VBS. Now that's a gift that keeps on giving.

So now it's your turn. Which of these ideas will you implement this year in your follow-up strategy?

Thomas is VBS ministry specialist for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.